

[Growing Up with the Automobile]

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Street Address 18 Cumberland

Place Charleston, S. C.

Occupation Mechanic

Name of Writer Rose D. Workman

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1

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Rose D. Workman

Charleston, S. C.

Feb. 10, 1939 GROWING UP WITH THE AUTOMOBILE

"Why, yes, Ma'am. I'd be glad to tell you my story," said Albert Henderson, crawling from under the car on which he was working in the dark, damp hole in the wall, which is all that is left of his "Shop," since the tornado of September 29, 1938. He wiped the grease from his hands on a piece of old underclothing, tossed the rag into a corner, and placing an empty oil tin for me to sit upon, began:

"First of all, I suppose you want to know where I was born. Great men's birthplaces are always important, aren't they?" he grinned. "Well, I was born in Hamburg County, fifty years ago. I was due to have money, for my father's people used to own a lot of property in that part of the world, but my dad had the itching foot, and when he was a young man, he went out to Texas in search of adventure.

"Dad wasn't a bit practical. He left his property to be looked out for by some step-relatives, and then forgot all about it. Well, they looked out for it all right! - When Dad came home a few years later, ready to settle down, he found he didn't have any place to settle. - Oh, he did have one little cottage, and a few acres of farm land left, but all the rest had gone for taxes.

"Dad never seemed to mind being poor," Bert said, "but I expect it was mighty hard on Mother. I guess she was homesick for Texas many a time.

"I remember she used to tell me about being descended from some poet 2 she called 'Moore'. She wrote poems herself sometimes, and how I loved to look at the big scrapbook where she pasted all her verses! I was always wild to have that book for myself," he went on wistfully, "but when I asked Sister about it a few years back, she said she had thrown

Library of Congress

it out one spring when she was house-cleaning. Sister hasn't one bit of sentiment in her whole make-up," he remarked, and he began to remove the old paint from the car which he was overhauling.

"Gosh, talking like this takes me back a long way! I remember how I used to sit at Mother's knee when I was a little fellow, and watch her sew. She sure was a wonder for embroidery! Her pieces done in colored silk used to take the prizes wherever she showed them," he added proudly; "and as she sewed, she told us children stories of her own childhood in Texas.

"I expect Mother's flowers meant more to her than anything else in the world except her children. I was her favorite, and we were mighty close together all her life. I used to help her with her posies, and I'd be as pleased as Punch when the neighbors bragged on them. Honest to Goodness, some of her flowers were the size of dinner plates! Soon as I got big enough I watered them for her, and kept them fertilized from the big barrel of liquid manure that always stood at the barn door. And when I got so I could handle tools I built her a pit so they wouldn't freeze, come cold weather.

3

"Mother was descended from another big bug, too," Bert went on, "an artist fellow she called Whistler. Once when I was a kid an invitation came for her to visit a Mr. and Mrs. Whistler who were staying at a famous Inn at Camden. Of course Mother didn't go. Where would she have got the clothes to have frocked up in?" he queried.

"But that will show you the kind of folks my mother came from," he said. "Now Dad was different. Although his people were big landowners once, they weren't a bit bookish. They were farmers, and liked to hunt and fish, and do all sorts of out-door things.

Library of Congress

"Dad was an artesian well driller. His work took him all over the low country boring wells, so that the small towns could have waterworks. Sometimes a well-to-do farmer would want one, too, so's he could irrigate his land, or have running water in the house.

"It was a pretty discouraging life, as I recall it. Sometimes Dad would strike rock, and not have even an inch to show for a long day of hard work. He used to charge on a sliding scale of a dollar a foot, base rate, and on the few occasions when he was successful in boring a well at a fairly decent profit, he'd have a big fish fry and invite all the neighborhood to help him celebrate.

"Dad was the kind of a man who believed in setting a good table, but he wasn't much for dress. If Mother hadn't been so smart with her needle, I guess we children would have looked like a mighty crumby little bunch sometimes.

4

But Mother could take an old suit of my uncle's - he had been an officer in the Confederate Army, and everybody around that section called him 'General' - and cut it down, and make it over so you would think it was brand new. Uncle was a rich old guy, and believed in buying the best when he went shopping, so when he turued his suits over to us, there was still plenty of wear in them."

"Hello, there, Bert," a boisterous voice interrupted, as Mr. Jones, proprietor of the stable next door, entered, mopping his crimson face with a soiled red handkerchief. "Gosh, the flies are bad, he bellowed. "Worse here than in the stable! Guess, they like it cause it's so cool and dark. This the hottest spring I ever remember since I been living in Old Town. - Kin I use the phone a minute Bert?"

Then, without waiting for consent, he called his number; had a long family chat, and hung up the receiver.

Library of Congress

"No use me paying for a phone when Bert has one hangin' on the wall," he said nonchalantly, and sauntered, whistling, out of the shop.

But he had waked Dottie, the runty Dalmatian bitch, who sprang up, bristling from her place on an old mat near the car where Bert was working. When peace had been restored again, Bert took up his story.

"Not much use telling you about when I was a kid," he said. "I didn't do anything different from what hundreds of other country boys were doing all over the world - milking cows, chopping wood, going to school, and helping Mother with the chickens.

5

"I was luckier then most of the gang, though, for when I finished graded school my uncle - the same old geezer who used to give Mother his clothes to make over for us, sent me to a military school for two years. I could have finished the whole four year course if I had wanted to. But I didn't want to be a school teacher, and I didn't want to be a farmer. I wanted to be doing things with my hands. So I went to work in a blacksmith shop.

"I can remember now how rich I felt when my boss handed me ten dollars for my first week's work," he said, "and I especially recall the first time I tried to shoe a horse all by myself. Want me to tell you about it?" he grinned. "Well, it was this way. I went down to work one morning, and there was one of the old farmers waiting for me.

"Hi, there, you Bert!" he called, soon as he laid his eyes on me. 'What did you do to my hawse? Hit's so lame it canyt ha'dly walk this mawnin'.'

"Well, I went over, picked up its foot, and looked at it. It had a right to be lame, all right. I had nailed the shoe on backwards.

"It took me a long time to live that story down," he said, with a rueful smile.

Library of Congress

"Well, I stayed on in the blacksmith shop for a year or two, learning the trade. Automobiles were just coming in then, and the owners of the only two in our village sent them to us for repairs, so I had my first training as an automobile mechanic right in that little old blacksmith's shop.

"But I didn't care about being a blacksmith all my life. While I liked to tinker on cars first rate, there weren't enough of them coming in to make it exciting, so I soon quit my blacksmith job, and went to work as a sewing machine salesman. I liked that fine!

"It was lots of fun driving a high-stepping horse over the country, and a salesman gets to meet a lot of pretty girls as he peddles machines from door to door. The girls liked to go driving, and believe me, I liked to take 'em. And I liked putting up nights at the little overgrown boarding houses that called themselves hotels.

"I liked being a telephone repairman, too, I met lots of girls when I was with that outfit - most married one of them," he grinned, pushing back greasy black hair with a grease-grimed hand. "But even though that job paid me swell - seventy-five dollars was good money thirty years ago - I never had any time to call my own. Sometimes in the middle of the night I'd get a long distance call that a wire was down somewhere. Out I'd have to go again; catch a train if I was lucky; or hire a horse and buggy, and drive out to string a new wire by moonlight.

"Looking back it seems like I was determined to try out everything before I decided on my life work, for after my telephone job I worked as a hot house gardener; a cabinet maker; and even drove for a transfer company for a while, before I decided to be an automobile mechanic.

"It's funny what little things change a man's whole life. I expect I'd still be knocking around working first at one thing, then at another, if the transfer company I was driving for hadn't bought a ramshackle old car. I remember exactly how that car looked," he said. "It was

Library of Congress

just about falling to pieces, it had had such hard usage. It was minus a windshield; minus a top; and it had a chain at the side; but it sure looked good to me.

"Mighty few people in those days knew how to drive a car, much less repair one, and I was mighty glad that I had learned to fix them in that little old blacksmith's shop, when the manager of the transfer company sent for me, and offered me twenty dollars a week 'with board' to drive the car and keep it in running order.

"Well, you can bet your bottom dollar I didn't turn that offer down! Pretty soon I was having the time of my life driving drummers around in the sputtering old machine, that smelt like - well, I'd hate to tell you what that engine did smell like! And did the gals like to go motoring!

"Then one day the old bus broke down entirely, and the Boss told me to take it over to Savannah, and have it completely overhauled. You see, we didn't have the proper equipment for doing as much work as the old bus needed this time, so over we went, and I sure enjoyed seeing the model garage, and working with all the fine tools. The manager was mighty nice to me, and let me work on the other cars too. I learned a lot that way, and by matching the other mechanics. Then one day the foreman said:

"Henderson, if you ever want to get out of the transfer business, come back here and work for me. I'd like to have you in the shop.'

"Well, I was sitting on top of the world then! But I couldn't let my old boss down by leaving him without a driver, so I told the foreman I'd have to give the Old Man a month's notice. Home I went, and I never worked so hard in all my life as I did then, hunting up another driver for Mr. Gaines. But I found one OK, before the month was up, and went back to Savannah. I guess I never will be as happy again as I was the day I started to work in that automobile garage.

"But luck was against me. Cars were still far from plentiful, and parts came high. Soon the bills had piled up so bad that they had to close up shop.

Library of Congress

"But I wanted to stay in that kind of work. I made up my mind to stick. I stuck, picking up what odd jobs I could find, but sometimes my ribs felt like they were sticking into me, I was so hungry.

"At last one day, just when I felt that I couldn't stand it any longer, my luck turned. Mr. Golden, the president of the bank which had foreclosed on the garage and a number of used cars, sent for me to come out to his home.

'Jesu! I never had seen anything like that place! Bushes of flowers as high as your head! Cement walks winding in and out of shrubbery. I was scared green, but I went an until I came to the house.

"Mr. Golden asked me in, and we sat down in a small parlor. He was just as nice and friendly as if he didn't have a cent. Gave me a cigar and we sat there smoking. After we had talked a while he told me what he wanted. I was to stay on in Savannah, and take these cars and go over them one by one, and put them 9 all in good working condition, so that he could resell them and get back some of the bank's money.

"So everything was all right. I could keep on doing what I wanted to and still show the folks back home I wasn't a piker.

"You see, when I first started work with the transfer company as mechanic and driver, some people had made the remark that I never stuck to anything long. That automobiles were just a fad, and I'd be back on the farm before much longer.

"Well, I showed them. I'm still showing them," he added grimly.

"After a few months all the cars were rebuilt and disposed of, and I was lucky to get my old job with the transfer company back again.

Library of Congress

"So," he went on, carefully spraying paint on a oar as he talked, "you might say that I've practically grown up with the automobile.

"After a while I bought a car of my own - one of the first five sold in my county. I rented it as a side line to drummers, for fifteen dollars a day.

"I spent money freely when a young sprout, frolicking up and down the state. One weekend I came to old Town, and liked it so well I decided to stay. I had saved a little money and opened up a garage for myself.

"Those were prosperous days twenty years ago. Soon I had four men working for me in the daytime, and three on night shift. They kept busy all the time, and made plenty of money for me, besides earning good money for themselves.

10

"When people pay from fifteen hundred to five thousand dollars for an automobile as they did in those days, they expect it to last a long time. And they expect repair bills to come high. They repaired and repainted their cars, just as they repaired and repainted their homes.

"Many a time "I've given a man a bill for as much as eight hundred dollars for overhauling his machine, and had him hand me a check for the entire amount. Nowadays if you charge a man fifteen or twenty dollars, he acts as if you were a highwayman, and you don't got paid in full either. Usually he comes in on the fifteenth and pays you five dollars on account, and acts like he is doing you a favor to pay you anything at all.

"Of course, everybody isn't like that. But I'm telling you this, so you can see how different times are now from when they were twenty years ago.

"Yesterday people bought automobiles. Today they buy cars. There's a lot of difference between the two if you come to think of it.

Library of Congress

"I've made big money in my day. Once I had the agency for a certain truck. Every time one of that company's trucks was sold in my territory I get a fat commission. I lived high then!

"Right now I'm having a pretty thin time of it. Business is bad, and seems to get worse for me instead of better. I think one cause of this is that when you can buy a good car for six seven hundred dollars, a man would rather turn his in at the end of a year, and get a new one, than bother about having repairs made. And of course, repair work is my living.

11

"For instance, I had charge of keeping a whole fleet of trucks in order for a big wholesale candy company. That alone paid my running expense. Now the company has sold all their trucks and bought new ones. You can see what that one deal has meant to my business.

"Another firm that I worked with in the same way has lately hired a mechanic full time to keep their trucks in order. That means another big loss to me.

"Right now I don't even have a helper. I had a first rate mechanic until a few months ago. He came in one day looking for job. He said that he had never been in the city before, and that he didn't know a thing about a car. All he knew was he wanted to be a mechanic. I took him in and paid him six dollars a week. That was four years ago. I taught him everything I knew, and in the evenings I made him go to the vocational school and learn all the up-to-date methods I'd never had time to get around to learning.

"Then in September the tornado hit the town, and blew the roof right off my shop. Since then I've scarcely been able to do what little work I could get, on account of not having any place to work in. In good weather, I can work in the street in front of the shop; but in bad weather all I have is this little cubby hole here.

"When my mechanic realized how bad business was getting, he answered an add in the paper, and got a place with a large automobile concern, with bigger wages and shorter hours. I was paying him twenty a week when he left me. They 12 give him twenty-five, with

Library of Congress

time and a half for overtime. I don't blame him for going. He's young, and he has his way to make. But it's been hard for me to get along without him, because instead of being free to get out and hunt up business, I've had to stick around the shop all the time, to keep from losing what little might come in.

"Another way I figure the tornado hurt me, is that so many concerns had such big repairs to make on their buildings that they are only doing what is absolutely necessary to keep their cars in running condition. Where before the storm they would send me a truck in and tell me to do everything that was needed, now they tell me to do just what has to be done to keep it going.

"Then, another thing! When people come by, they see this little hole that is all the place I have to work in until the repairs are finished; they look at the bulging walls and the missing roof, and take their cars somewhere else.

"At first I thought I would have to move, but after I thought it over, I made the owner a proposition, and he took me up on it. I suggested that I do the actual repair work myself, and he furnish the material. I'm to get free rent for twenty-four months for my work. While business is slack I figured I might as well be doing that as nothing, and a saving of thirty dollars a month for twenty-four months is not to be sneered at.

"I had to do a lot of persuading though, because the owner was in the notion just to tear the whole place down. But I wanted to stay here. People know where I am, and besides, it's hard to move a business like mine - there's 13 so much heavy stuff iron and junk.

"I believe, though, that business is really getting better after all, at least for other people. For not only my mechanic has a job, but even the darkey who helps as when I get in a jam, couldn't come last week, but sent word he had a permanent place with a lumber company. So it seems that jobs are getting more plentiful, and that's a good thing.

Library of Congress

"My wife wants me to close up shop and get a job myself. I'm a good mechanic. I've got customers I've had for years who wouldn't let anybody else touch their cars. I know I could get a job if I wanted one.

"But I've seen too many good men give up their own little businesses when times got hard. They'd take a job, and maybe it would peter out in six months' time. Then there they were on relief, or maybe with nothing at all.

"No, I've weathered the depression this far, and I'm going to stick it out as long as I can. I like my bone.

"You know the story, don't you? My mother used to read it to me out of a book called 'Aesop's Fables.' It goes like this:

"Once a dog got himself a bone, and off he trotted with it as happy as could be. But on the way home he had to go over a bridge, and looking down into the water the dog saw another dog with a big, juicy bone in its mouth, trotting over a bridge. He thought:

"I'll go take that bone away from that dog. It's a bigger bone than the one I've got."

14

"So he dropped the bone he had. It fell into the water with a splash. Then the greedy dog had no bone at all.

"No, thanks. No job for me. I like my bone, and I'm going to hold on to it as long as I can. If Bette wants more than I can give her, she'll either have to divorce me and marry a rich man, or get a job for herself," he grinned.

"Of course, you understand I'm only joking about Bette taking a job," he hastened to explain, returning from a brief telephone conversation, in which he promised to call for a car at six that evening, and have it ready by nine in the morning. "She's not a bit strong,

Library of Congress

and couldn't hold a job down, even if I'd let her take one, which I wouldn't under any circumstances. I don't believe in married women working.

"Bette's a peach," he said. "Fair as I'm dark; walks like a little queen; and neat as wax. It worries her terribly the way I go around in dirty overalls, needing a shave, and my hair hanging down in my eyes, but I tell her I can't stop to doll up every time I get a call. Anybody who has any sense understands a mechanic can't look like a fashion plate all the time.

"But I do try to please her all I can," he said. "I never let her get up in the morning to cook breakfast. She fixes the coffee in the percolator at night, and when the old alarm goes off at seven, I reach for a match and a cigarette.

"With the same match I light a fag, and start the coffee perking. Then I sneak around real easy, so as not to wake Bette up, and make the fire in the big coal burner in the living room. I like the house to be nice and warm before she gets up. Then I drink a couple of cups of coffee, and go to work.

"About nine or nine-thirty I knock off long enough to go to the baker store and buy a half a dozen cinnamon rolls. Then I get a pint of milk, go back to the shop, and have my breakfast.

"It's awfully hard in my business to make any definite plans for anything, even a dinner hour," he said. "Bette goes ahead and cooks the vegetables, and makes the biscuits, and has everything ready except the steak, when I come in.

"If I don't come home by two, she eats her dinner, and heats mine up for me later. It's hard on both of us, but it's the best I can do.

"It's the same way at night. We can't even have a regular supper hour, for lots of people bring in their cars when they knock off work, and want them back to keep a date the same

Library of Congress

evening. Or maybe they'll ask for them to be delivered the first thing in the morning. That means night work, but I never turn down a job. Sometimes I've stayed on at the shop until three or four in the morning, and been back at work at seven as usual.

"I've rigged up a shower at the back of the Shop," Bert said, "and after I close up for the night, I take a shower, put on clean clothes, and go for a stroll on Main Street. Sometimes I drop into the pool room for a game or two, and sometimes I just stay an at the Shop, tinkering on some old car I've taken in as payment on a bill, or picked up at a bargain somewhere. I make quite a bit of change on these deals, because as I either buy the parts at wholesale prices, or use portions of discarded machines, I can always sell the rebuilt car at a good profit.

16

"Then, round ten o'clock," he continued, "I usually push on home. We have a late supper, turn on the radio, and enjoy ourselves. This is our favorite hour of the day.

"I've got a dandy chair Bette gave me for a Christmas present two or three years ago, and a little smoking stand she gave me last year, and a big shell ash tray. Bette's a swell housekeeper, and she doesn't like for me to drop ashes all over the floor. She's just lately bought a real expensive blue 'art square' she calls it, for the living room, and although I tease her and tell her ashes are good for carpets, she most has a fit if I spill any on it," he laughed.

"Bette's always after me for smoking too much," he said, tearing open a package of cigarettes, "and I expect she's right about it at that, for I usually smoke at least two packs a day. If I'm worried or upset about anything, sometimes I smoke three. I'm trying my darndest to cut down on it, but I haven't made much headway so far.

Library of Congress

"But what do you think of the New Deal?" he asked, abruptly changing the subject as he flicked away a match. "All I know about politics is what I pick up from the boys at the pool room, or from what customers tell me while I'm working on their cars.

"The way I understand it the President really had a fine idea when he planned the New Deal. But people seem to think that the wrong folks are getting the money. It's got into the hands of the politicians now, and there're a lot 17 of things going on that the President never intended.

"Of course, I don't know a thing about it first hand, because as I said a while ago, I've been lucky enough to keep off the relief rolls. But I do know that the white people in the South had better stick together, and so Bette and I both vote the Democratic ticket no matter whether we like the candidate or not.

"I don't do much reading myself," Bert took up his story after another brief telephone conversation, "but Bette tells me anything she thinks will interest me in the newspaper, and sometimes she reads me a story out of 'Liberty' or the 'Pictorial Review'.

"I sure wish we had some children," he said, changing the subject abruptly again after a few moments of silence. "Our baby died when he was just a little fellow. I wanted to adopt a couple of kids when I saw we weren't likely to have any more, but Bette wouldn't hear of it. Her idea is that if God had meant for us to have any, he'd have given us some of our own.

"Honestly, I don't know what we'd do without our little dog Maxie," he continued more cheerfully. "He sleeps in a rocking chair in the sitting room and is just like a child to us. My wife laughs at me because I call him my 'little dog,' when really he is a great big fellow. One of our friends has nicknamed him the 'Hound of the Baskervilles.' Seems like that is a story about a big black dog, and Maxie sure is black. So I guess the name suits him all 18 right. I don't really know what kind of a dog he is exactly. Little mixture of everything, I

Library of Congress

expect. I don't lay claims to any blue blood for Maxie, but he's a mighty fine dog just the same, and worships the ground Bette walks on. He's got good taste, you see," he grinned.

"Bette's never really gotten over the shock of the operation she had when the baby was born," Bert said. "She's had a horror of doctors and hospitals ever since. Last summer she pretty nearly drove me crazy. She got sick. Was all run down; wouldn't eat, and didn't have a bit of pep. But she wouldn't see a doctor. At last she got so bad of she really got frightened about herself, and so she said I could take her to a doctor. Even then she wouldn't let one come to the house. The doctor said she was anaemic, and very nervous, and by that time she was so run down it took months to build her up again.

"It keeps me worried all the time," said Bert, with a troubled frown.

"I can't understand, either, why she's so delicate," he went on in a puzzled manner. "Her father lived to be eighty-one, and up to two weeks before his death he had never been sick a day in his life. Lived on a horse's back. Her mother is seventy years old, and still hale and hearty.

"Bette was raised on a farm in Fairfax County. All her people are Baptists. Her grandfather was a Baptist preacher.

"Now I'm a Methodist," said Bert, "But as I don't go to church more than once or twice a year, it doesn't matter that we belong to different churches.

19

"Bette has religion enough for both of us. She goes to church every Sunday, and disapproves of almost every kind of amusement. She thinks it is wrong to play cards, or take a drink, or dance or smoke.

Library of Congress

"Now I always liked dancing fine. When I was a young man I knew all the square dances, and they used to get me to call the figures for them. The last dance I went to was the night Bette and I got married," he said smilingly.

"I remember it like it was yesterday. We were out riding and I said, 'Let's go to a parson and get married.' She didn't make any objection, so that's what we did.

"We sent a telegram home to her folks and put up at the hotel in the little town where I was working. There was a big dance going on in the hall behind the post office. I thought it would be fun for us to go to it, and surprise them, and Bette could meet all my friends at the same time. But she wouldn't go. I got mad and went alone. But that's the last time the word 'dance' has been mentioned in our family.

"I'd like to go to one again," he sighed, regretfully.

"Getting back to the subject of religion," said Bert, "I give Bette the church money for the family, but I do my own charity work myself, so I can see where my money goes. I like to send the ragged little boys who hang around the shop to the movies occasionally, and give them money for ice cream cones to cool them off in summer.

20

"Another thing I enjoy doing," he said, "is keeping a room in the garage for folks who get stranded without a place to sleep. Lots of times I stake them to a cup of coffee and one of my cinnamon rolls for breakfast.

"You know," he continued, rather sheepishly, "I used to drink a lot in my younger days, and though I haven't touched a drop of liquor now for over five years, drunks still come to me for a pint to sober up on. If I've got the price in my pocket, they always get it too. I haven't forgotten when a fellow needs a friend," he add wryly.

Library of Congress

"You've heard the old saying that opposites attract? Well, I expect that's what drew Bette and me together, for we sure are as different as day is from night. Like I told you, she thinks pretty near everything is wrong, while I don't think anything is wrong as long as you do it in moderation.

"But I wish I could practice what I preach," he said, "for though I don't drink liquor any more, I sure am a coffee drunkard. Sometimes at our eleven o'clock supper I'll drink four, maybe five, cups of strong black coffee. But it doesn't seem to hurt me any. I can turn in right away and go to sleep time my head hits the pillow. - I wish I could show you my swell box-spring mattress. It sure is a beauty. I don't see how anybody could stay awake with a mattress like that to sleep on.

"The doctors all tell you coffee keeps you awake. But Bette never drinks anything but milk, and she can't get to sleep for hours and hours, even 21 though she sleeps on a mattress just like mine, in the bedroom where it's nice and quiet, and she can't hear the noises in the street.

"Sometimes after I've been asleep for hours she'll wake me up to show me some verse in the Bible that she's come across that she thinks will be helpful to me. And sometimes I'll come in and find her listening to a sermon on the radio, with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Yes, Bette takes her religion hard," he concluded.

"I expect I get more enjoyment out of my radio than anything else," he said, as he completed a small repair job on a customer's car. "I wouldn't miss Charley McCarthy on a bet, and I certainly do like the programs with Donald Duck, and Amos and Andy.

Library of Congress

"I like music too. Nothing highbrow, but I could listen to pieces like 'Coming Round the Mountain,' and 'Home on the Range', and 'Church in the Wildwood' all evening long, and never get tired.

"It's funny how things go,' he said. "We've been living in Old Town now for twenty years, and twelve of them we stayed in one place, an upper apartment on Joining Street. Then one day I came home, and found Bette pretty nearly in hysterics. A printing press had been set up downstairs, and the noise was almost driving her mad. So out we went to try to find something else. We looked and we looked, and finally we found a nice little place, but it was pretty far from the shopping district. It was new and clean, though, so we 22 took it and moved in. But we might as well have stayed over the printing press, for the people next door had three dogs that they kept tied up all the time. Well, the noise those dogs made when they started howling on moonlight nights, the printing press was nothing to it! So out we got again. Next place the children overhead made so much noise that Bette couldn't get her early morning nap. So we packed up and moved once more - that made three moves in six months. But I honestly believe we've found the ideal place this time.

"It's over a mirror shop, and it's just as quiet and nice as can be. There aren't any noisy children near and none of the neighbors keep dogs.

"The place was so run down and shabby when we first saw it that Bette didn't want to take it; but the rent was only fifteen dollars a month, 'as is,' and I knew that some fresh paper and paint would make all the difference in the world. There was a great big living room, a bedroom the same size, a small bedroom at the back for Bette, and a kitchen and dining room combined, besides a bathroom and a wide piazza all along the southern side of the house. I didn't see where we would ever find another place as good, and as reasonable, too, so I rented it as soon as I saw it.

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"Of course, it took alot of time and a lot of work to fix it up so we could move in, but I wish you could see it now. You wouldn't know it for the same place. I wish you knew Bette so you could go and see it. But I'll tell you all about it, anyway.

23

"All the walls are cream colored now, and I painted the doors and the rest of the woodwork ivory. Then I stained and waxed the floors and Bette has made bright new curtains for the windows. It sure looks gay and pretty.

"If we can stay there for as long as a year and a half it will really be cheap rent for us," he said, but if we have to move before then we wont come out. The paint cost a lot, to say nothing of all the work and time I put in, fixing up the place.

"That part of town is improving so fast though I'm afraid somebody will buy the building and remodel it. Lots of newcomers are buying in that section.

"I put in an instantaneous heater in the bathroom, too, for there was no hot water. I bought a good one at a bargain that was in a house they tore down after the tornado. Then I put in a porcelain sink in the kitchen. I'm a pretty good plumber myself, you see, so all it cost me was the price of the fixtures.

"I like it there, also, because it's nice and sunshiny for Bette's flowers, and there's a yard for Maxie.

"Bette doesn't go out much," said Bert. "She likes to stay at home and sew. She can make a dress for a few dollars that looks like it cost a million," he boasted. "She likes to go in the shops and look at the clothes

24

Then she comes home and copies them for herself.

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"She can't do as much fine sewing as she used to, though. Last year her eyes were troubling her so much I told her to go get herself some glasses. But although they cost a pretty penny - twenty-five dollars to be exact, - they couldn't have been the right fit, for she can't see out of them at all. They stay in the drawer of the sewing table most of the time.

"When I need glasses I go to a five and ten cent store, and try on different ones until I find a pair that suits me. That way I can have two pair, far glasses and near glasses both, and if they break it doesn't much matter."

Bert paused a moment to blow his nose violently on a large, soiled handkerchief. "Gosh," he said, "I believe I'm getting one of my bad headaches!

"There's no doubt about it this kind of work is hard on a man's health. I got up in the morning feeling fine. Then I crawl under a cold automobile, and start handling a lot of heavy tools, or washing them in gasoline. By ten or eleven o'clock I'm a sick man, aching all over, and sneezing my head off.

"But what's the use of going to a doctor? All he'd do would be to give me a bottle of medicine, and tell me to stay in bed for a couple of days. Then as soon as I came back to work and had to crawl on the damp cement floor under a car, I'd start sneezing and aching all over again.

25

"No, there's no use asking the Lord to forgive you today if you're going to commit the same sin tomorrow. And so there's no use going to a doctor unless you're going to stop the things that make you sick.

"If I had my life to live over though, I'd certainly choose some other sort of work; but the way things are now, it's too late for me to change. The best that I can hope for is to keep on making a living for Bette and me.

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"Bette can't get used to being poor," he went on simply. "I hate not being able to give her things like I used to. But the way we lived before the depression it took about two hundred dollars a month to run the house and pay our personal expenses. Now some months we don't have hardly half of that, and it's mighty hard for two people to pay rent, and eat and cook, and dress and keep warm, on a measly hundred dollars. You may exist, but you don't really live.

"Eating costs us more than it should," he explained, "because I eat at restaurants a lot. I'm a husky man, and it takes a lot to fill me up. Bette's a good cook, and knows how to feed a man to keep him feeling fit. But she's ailing so much of the time I hate to have her use her strength in housework.

"But if she wont hire anybody to help her what can I do?" he queried helplessly, spreading out his big rough hands, palms upward in a gesture of appeal. "She could get a servant for two or three dollars a week to do everything she'd need done. But she says she doesn't like a darkey round the house.

"And then, too," he went on in further explanation of their financial difficulties, "Bette's never had to earn her living and so she doesn't understand the value of money very well. I remember last year she took a notion she wanted a new sofa. It cost seventy-nine dollars, and I really couldn't afford to buy it for her.

"She didn't need it either," he commented. "She had a pretty wicker set that was almost new. But she had her heart set on that sofa. Every day she would go to the furniture store and look at it. Then at supper she'd tell me how beautiful it was. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer. I told her to go and make the down payment on it, and have it sent home. 'But', I said, 'remember if you get that sofa now, there wont be any Christmas presents.'

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"Well, they sent the sofa home, and she was awfully bright and happy for a few days. Then about a week later she told me she had selected her Christmas present from me. It was a cameo broach, and she had told the antique dealer to put it aside for her.

"'Bette,' I reminded her, 'don't you know I told you when you got that sofa that there wouldn't be any Christmas presents?'

"'Oh,' she cried, as surprised as could be, 'I didn't know you meant that for me. I thought you meant there'd be no presents for other people.'

27

"Now, what can you do with a woman like that?" he queried.

"Another time when she took a notion she wanted a fur neckpiece, I didn't have a cent in my pocket. I sold my revolver and bought the scarf for her.

"I like for her to have nice things," he said, squinting critically, at the car on which he was doing on excellent repair job, "I think she's pretty nice-looking, and I like for her to have good clothes to set her looks off.

"But there's one thing I can do to make her happy. Bette likes to to ride, and I always manage to have a good car, somehow, no matter how hard times are. I always buy a heavy car, for though it may cost more and use more gasoline then a lighter, lower-priced one, a heavy car is a big help in my work. If I'm sent for on a hurry call sometimes I can pull a machine out of a hole with a powerful car, while with a light one I'd have to go back to my shop and get my wrecker."

Bert paused long enough to light another cigarette and then sat down upon the running board of a battered old car, where he smoked a moment in somber meditation before he said:

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"What worries me more than anything else is the fact that I haven't saved a single penny for a rainy day. If I get sick or hurt I don't know how on earth we'd manage.

28

I've got a little insurance policy, though, for five thousand dollars for Bette, so if I kick off any time she'll be safe enough. But I was so afraid that if she got her hands on it she would spend it all in a month or two, and then be left without a penny, that I've arranged to have it paid her in small monthly installments; then if anything happens to me I know she won't starve - for a while anyway. I worry a lot about that girl," he ended with a sigh.

In a moment however, he brightened, and announced:

"If I live long enough, though, I'll tell the world we're going to have a peach of a home. About a year and a half ago I had a stroke of luck. I heard that the owners of a fine old house in what is now the business section of the city were planning to wreck it. So I went to them and made the proposition that I'd wreck the place free of charge if they'd give me the house itself for my trouble.

"And believe me, I got a bargain! It was hard work, and I did a lot of it myself - only had a couple of darkeys to help me. But the timbers were all of cypress, and the floors, doors, and ceiling all as sound as the day the house was built.

"In that way I got better material than I could have bought, even if I'd had the money to buy new stuff.

"I wish you could see the house I'm building," he said, enthusiastically. "I'm doing it all myself, you know, with just a laborer or two to help out occasionally on big jobs like the reef, and things I can't handle alone.

"Of course, I don't have much time to work on it, excepting Sundays, and Bette doesn't approve of my working on 'The Lord's Day,' as she calls it. But I do it anyhow, because

Library of Congress

that's the only way we'll ever have a home of our own, and I believe that 'God helps these who help themselves.'

"The house is of peeled pine logs. I'm buying a five acre tract about ten miles out, paying for it in monthly installments of ten dollars each. The big living room looks out over a grove of young pines, with a sprinkling of oaks and magnolias, and lots of dogwood. I've named the place 'Snow Cap' and I'm telling you now, you'd have to go a long way to see a prettier sight in spring time than that little low loghouse with the dogwood blooming about it.

"But best of all the place runs right down to the water, and the two bedrooms and breakfast nook have a swell view of the river and marsh. I've set out figs and grapes, and all sorts of fruit trees on the low land at the back, and in the front, along the drive, I've put out asaleas and japonicas and lots of blooming shrubs. You see, I still love flowers, and I can certainly get them to grow! I expect I ought to have been a florist after all! - Then I've fenced the whole place, and bordered it with crepe myrtles. It's going to be a beauty spot one of these days - if I just live long enough to finish it," he ended rather sadly.

30

"Now if Bette would only go out there to stay," he went on, "I could get a lot done in the early mornings and late afternoons after I knock off. But she says there's nothing doing.

"I'm getting on pretty good though in spite of everything," he said. "Of course, the work on the shop has held me back a lot this winter, but the framework is up, the roof is on, and one bedroom and bath are complete, just waiting for Bette to move in.

"I've piped the place for running water, and I've wired it for electric lights. But I'm proudest of all of my chimney.

"I built it all of the big old English brick I salvaged from the house in town. Then I planted ivy at the base. And dose that chimney draw! Doesn't smoke, no matter what direction the wind blows from," he boasted.

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“Bette's going to have the surprise of her life when she sees the place again,” he concluded, as he rose to wait upon a customer. “She hasn't been out for most a year now. Maybe when she sees how fine it's coming along, and how pretty it looks with all the flowers in bloom, she'll be willing to move out. I sure hope so, for I can hardly wait to sleep in a house of my own.”